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ABSTRACT

A study of the effectiveness of music and rhythm used in classroom activities as a technique for developing short-term memory for phonological learning had as subjects 25 adult Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, and Vietnamese immigrants, students in a course in English as a second language. The subjects were given a pretest of their ability to distinguish similar and dissimilar initial and final phonemes in 20 word pairs. The phonemes focused on were sh/s/z/l/r/c/ch/p/f. Those who followed the directions in their responses were assigned to two groups, a treatment and a control group. Both groups were given 20 minutes of instruction twice a week, for two weeks. The control group was given minimal pairs highlighting the above phonemes, and the experimental group was given various songs and rhythmic chants presenting the same sounds contextually. A posttest similar to the pretest was administered after two weeks. The experimental group had slightly higher posttest scores than the control group. This finding suggests an advantage in the experimental treatment, especially in view of the previous experience of the individuals composing the two groups. In addition, the experimental group's scores were all bunched around a central score, suggesting that the experimental group advanced more as a group than did the control group, whose scores were distributed over a full range of scores. (MSE)

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Can Southeast Asian Students Learn to Discriminate between English Phonemes more Quickly with the Aid of Music and Rhythm?

Lisa Karimer

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The use of music and song were an integral part of language teaching as far back as the Middle Ages. Students were introduced to a second language in what was known as the "Song School." After the rhythm and flow of the language had been drilled by chant, which was based solidly on speech rhythms, the pupil began the formal study of the second language--usually Latin.

From that time, the use of rhythms as an aid to teaching a second language has been recognized, although of course, it has always been accepted that rhythm and music are important tools in teaching young children their own language. Both Alexander Bell and Peter Guberina, professor of phonetics at Zagut and Paris, explored the idea of teaching speech in rhythmic units. No sound was ever presented or drilled outside a phonological or grammatical structure, and if possible, it was taught in a context involving some emotional or physical reaction.

Guberina used a machine called "Suvag lingua," in which he had his pupils listen to typical rhythms of the second language given out in low frequencies; these he regarded as being more stimulating, because they were in tune with the basic frequencies to which the body as a resonator would react. Every sound that he taught had a definite emotional color or typical context in which it was best taught.

In the 20th century a number of techniques using, often-times, the germinal ideas that Bell and Guberina employed were developed and expanded into systems for teaching second languages. These opened the door to completely new concepts in second language teaching.

One of these was to induce in the students a semi-hypnotic state which would enable them to better concentrate on the material to be learned. There was sleep learning - a method involving the use of taped materials, repeated over and over, while all the students slept.

Suggestopedia is a system developed in Bulgaria by Dr. Georgi Lozanov which promises faster memorization and stronger retention through concentrated visualization. (Ostrander, 1980).

There are myriad systems which use various aspects of yoga and other mediation systems which are supposed to induce faster learning and greater retention by being geared to breathing or body pulsations.

The fact that a person with a bad stutter can speak unhesitatingly in rhythm has been a starting point for some radical innovations in language learning.

All in all, practical advantages of these systems have been somewhat controversial. They make interesting subjects for magazine articles, but their true value has not been definitely proved. It is my intention to use one of these techniques and test its practical value in my own classroom to see what results I obtain in my particular world of language learning.

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Many L2 learners are taught pronunciation of L2 lexical items in isolated environments; an example of this would be a minimal pair set. According to some researchers, this practice is ineffective in terms of teaching the L2 learner to memorize expedientl, and in terms of teaching him to discriminate between the various sound patterns of English. Can one hasten the goal of acquiring native-like fluency through the use of nursery rhymes, chants and songs? I could more specifically state the question in the following way: "Can Southeast Asian beginning-level students learn to discriminate between the various sound patterns of English more expediently through the use of minimal pairs or through the use of rhymes, chants and songs?"

A "minimnal pair", is defined in 25 Centuries of Language Teaching , as "two words that differ in one phoneme only." (Kelly, 1976). During the 1950's and 1960's it was considered the most commonly used drill. In Pronunciation Contrasts in English (Nilsen, 1973), minimal pair units are prescribed to aid students experiencing "native language interference," in which the deeply established first language habits of the student tend to predominate until the new English speech patterns have been firmly mastered.

Earl W. Stevick (Stevick, 1982), an authority on language teaching, claims that fluency depends at least as much on emotional factors as on amount of practice, and that what a learner practices is the mobilization of competence, not just the repetition of performance.

Research on human memory has brought to light the fact that what we think of as separate items are not stored separately. Further research revealed that sensory data that come together are stored together. The smell of chalk, for example, immediately conjures up images of small, wooden desks and chairs with gum hidden under the seats. In other words, just as no man is an island, it is my assumption that in the students' acquisition of a second language, not just one sense is or should be affected. My contention is that by using music and/or rhythm as a leitmotif the student will be able to establish an image from which to pull, which will enable him to utilize his short-term memory.

Population

My population consisted of 25 Southeast Asian adults over the age of 18. They were enrolled in an 8 week term. This group was subdivided into 3 basic, ethnic groups: Cambodian, Lao Hmong and Vietnamese. Collectively the 4 groups share educational handicaps insofar as their being victims of culture shock, and because of the fact that their languages bear little phonetic similarity to English. Though the Vietnamese generally came from big cities, the Lao Hmong and the Cambodians typically came from rural or mountainous areas and were traditionally farmers. The Hmong, tribal people from the mountains of Laos, specifically, were not literate in their native tongue. I took a particular interest in doing this experiment with the Lao Hmong because of the fact that one of their traditions is that when a man looks for a wife, he specifically looks for two qualities: the ability to sew and the ability to sing. The courtship ritual in their tradition involves having the man sing an original love song to the object of his

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affection as they throw a ball back and forth to her. She must respond by imitating his intonation patterns exactly, and then by initiating her own. My experience in teaching the Hmong has been that they seem to have a "good ear" for language and I must admit a bias in this direction.

I chose 5 moderator variables which were as follows: age, sex, nationality, and the number of languages spoken by the individual. My final results will help me to evaluate whether these variables were chosen appropriately.

It has been my experience that the Vietnamese have the most trouble, as compared with the other groups, when it comes to discriminating between particular English phonemes as a result of interference from their first language. Vietnamese is a mono-syllabic language in which there are no final consonants and no consonant clusters. There is no phoneme /p/ and the closest sounding phoneme in English is that of /f/.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese have the advantage of having used the Roman alphabet and having a vowel system which is closely related to that of English. (In the Seventeenth century missionaries invented a Roman transcription for the language which is used for all purposes today.)

Procedures

The students were given a pre-test, listening examination in which they were asked to determine whether a particular phoneme in the first word was present or not present in the second word. For example, the first set consisted of the words: cook and color. I read the two words slowly and repeated them three times. Then I asked the students to write S for same if the two words shared the same initial sound or D for different if the two words did not. I continued this procedure until the students heard 20 words. They were asked to judge 10 phonemes positioned initially, and 10 phonemes placed finally.

I chose to use a pre-test, post-test design, and to use the scores on this listening exam and another test which would be given in two weeks as my post-test.

The phonemes to which I paid particular attention were as follows: sh/s/z/l/r/c/ch/p/f. After looking at the papers I discovered that out of the 25 students, 7 did not follow the directions properly. Therefore I decided not to use them in my findings. Half of the available population was assigned to a control group and half to an experimental group.

Both groups were given a treatment consisting of 20 minutes of instruction, twice a week, over a 2 week period. The control group was given minimal pairs which highlighted the previously mentioned phonemes. The experimental group was given various songs and rhythmic chants which presented the same sounds contextually.

The students in the control group were asked to listen to a word list of 10 minimal pairs. Then the minimal pair sets were written on the board. The teacher read one of the words in each set and then asked individual students to decide if the word that she uttered matched the first word or the second word. The following will serve as

an example:

1	2
said	shed
pill	fill
rock	lock
buzz	bus

The students in the experimental group were asked to learn the following songs and chants. The words of these songs and chants follow:

1. Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy;
   Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry;
   Sunshine on the water looks so lovely;
   Sunshine almost always makes me cry.

2. I love the mountains,
   I love the daffodils,
   I love the flowers,
   I love the rolling hills,
   I love the fireside,
   when all the lights are low.

3. How much wood could a woodchuck chuck,
   if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

4. Sally sells seashells by the seashore.

5. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

6. Someone's singing, Lord, Kum bay yah.
   Someone's singing, Lord, Kum bay yah.
   Someone's singing, Lord, Kum bay yah.
   Oh, Lord, Kum bay yah.

The students were instructed to listen carefully to the songs as the teacher sang each one three times. Individual students were asked to identify specific sounds by clapping as they heard. In other words, a student would be asked to listen carefully for the /s/ phoneme in the first song. Then he would proceed to clap his hands each time he recognized it. The songs and chants were specifically chosen because the consonants which they contrasted posed particularly difficult problems for the student.

The students were given a post-test similar to that of the pre-test after the two week period ended. Again, the students, collectively, were asked to distinguish between the varying consonantal sounds in 20 words.

Data Analysis/Conclusion

The test results shown on the chart reveal that the mean score of Group I was 67.7 on the pre-test. The mean score of Group II was 63.3 (Group I refers to the control group and Group II refers to the experimental group).

The mean score for the post-test of Group I was 71.6 and the mean score for the post-test of Group II was 73.3.

Although the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was only 1.7, the difference is noteworthy when an examination of the scores reveals that Group I had higher scores in general than Group II - yet Group II had higher scores in the post-test. There seems to be, therefore, an advantage in the use of the experimental treatment. One must consider, too, that the higher scores for Group I in the pre-test resulted from the fact that there were five Vietnamese students, whereas there were only two in Group II. Only the students from Vietnam have lived in an urban society and have experienced a broad vocabulary. The others, from Cambodia and Laos, lived as peasants in rural territory where vocabulary was limited and writing was even unknown in some cases. In consideration of this, the higher score of Group II, however small, is more significant.

The distribution of the scores are of interest. Whereas the scores of the post-test of Group I are distributed thinly across the full range of scores, the post-test scores of Group II are bunched in a central position. This could indicate that Group II was advancing in their learning as a group. In Group I the better students and poorer students retained their same ranking. This could indicate that the experimental treatment held some universal advantage which was available to both the more and less skillful students.

It seems natural enough that the experimental group, whose learning was aided by the treatment, would have an advantage. To reiterate, the experimental treatment affects many of the sensory inputs which definitely encourage memory retention. But then other factors enter: It may be true that I taught with greater enthusiasm and vigor during the experimental group treatment, simply because it was an experiment and new to my teaching method.

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STUDENT	AGE	PRE-TEST	POST TEST	SEX	COUNTRY
Group I					
1	18	85	90	M	Vietnam
2	21	55	55	M	Cambodia
3	35	80	80	M	Vietnam
4	45	80	85	M	Cambodia
5	30	70	80	F	Laos
6	29	60	65	F	Vietnam
7	23	55	55	F	Vietnam
8	46	85	90	F	Cambodia
9	37	40	45	F	Vietnam
Group II					
1	52	70	80	F	Laos
2	25	80	80	M	Cambodia
3	19	70	85	M	Cambodia
4	29	65	65	M	Vietnam
5	20	75	85	M	Vietnam
6	21	70	75	M	Laos
7	18	75	85	F	Cambodia
8	30	45	60	M	Cambodia
9	19	20	45	F	Cambodia

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Group I	x = 67.7	x = 71.6
Group II	x = 63.3	x = 73.3

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